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ABSTRACT

This document contains ideas for teaching English as a second language to young children from varied language backgrounds. Several visual aids are discussed: the object box, pictorial games, the felt board and experience chart, action games, and instructional pictures. (VM)

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TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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This semester I was assigned two small groups of Non-English speaking children. Since this is my first semester as a teacher I was naturally quite overwhelmed by such a responsibility. The majority of my students have been in the United States for about three months and therefore I knew my job would entail a great amount of planning and naturally a great amount of learning about the techniques of teaching English as a second language. I was worried by the fact that my children are not only from one geographical area, but rather from all over the world and of course speak many different languages. I wondered if I would be at a loss, not knowing the native tongues of the students. However, I had to decide on a plan of attack regardless of these linguistic limitations. I began pondering the question of what language actually is. Spoken language is a universal phenomenon and is man's main avenue for communication. It occurred to me that the only approach to teaching these children English would be strictly visual and spoken. When I was given these classes they were working with a basic phonics workbook and I realized that such an approach would be absolutely useless for them. How could these children be expected to read and write in a foreign tongue when they had no verbal fluency whatever?

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Another important thing that would have to be considered is the fact that a person's culture and language are very closely related. Therefore I would have to show these children a great deal of respect for their native language and at the same time try to incorporate various aspects of American culture in my teaching to enable them to adjust to this strange situation in which they had found themselves.

I was also aware of the fact that my English class would probably be their only real contact with the language. I realized that often in foreign-born families the traditions and language of the "old country" are emphasized and this would present a conflict between the two languages. Also there are many ingrained habits that are part of one's native language that might make it difficult to learn a new one. For example in English we often use stress to convey meanings, (Main street vs. the main street) wheras in another language this might have no function at all.

Then I began thinking of the way a person learns his native tongue. It is, of course, a slow, casual process. Language is nothing more than learned behavior patterns which are constantly used; actually it is no more than a habit. What is it that causes this habit to be formed? Obviously it is simply constant hearing

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and repetition and gradually association with objects and actions, so that language begins to be more than arbitrary sounds put together. These arbitrary sounds have now taken on very functional meanings.

I knew that the learning process would have to be a slow and tedious one and that I would have to progress systematically to allow the children to use the previous steps they had acquired.

Since these children are already aware of the communication aspect of language I knew that my approach would have to be entirely visual so that they could associate these strange sounds I was uttering with something familiar.

I summoned up all my artistic energies and busily began making flash cards of common objects. A friend acquisitioned an entire set of felt figures relating to units on the home, community helpers, etc. I began collecting pictorial games from teachers in my school. Finally I had a rather ample supply of visual aids. I then began gathering up any literature I could find on teaching English as a second language. I found an elementary textbook for the foreign-born that mapped out a detailed plan for teaching basic grammatical concepts.

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When I began reading the few books I was able to find on the subject I was naturally very proud to see that my thinking on the matter had been fairly accurate. The plans and techniques that these very prominent people in the field had written about were actually quite similar to my own.

The following half of this paper will be a compilation of my own ideas and the ideas of several experts in the field of teaching English as a second language. It will include a summary of the techniques and materials that are necessary for teaching non-English speaking children.

1. The object box -- This is a fairly large box that contains many school and household objects (often miniature versions of the real thing). It can be used to evaluate the children's actual vocabulary level of the language when first starting. The object box can become a pleasant routine each day. The children will learn a few necessary vocabulary words each day and will also be able to review the words of the previous day.

2. Pictorial Games -- I found that the children are fascinated by these games (for example - object lotto) . These games enable the children to develop their basic vocabulary and also to learn basic grammatical structure. For example, a typical dialogue during one game would include the question form of a sentence and the statement form of a sentence. "Who has this? I have it. What is this?

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This is an apple." The children are also learning a part of the present tense of the verbs to be and to have.

3. The felt board and the experience chart-- The children in one of my groups are more advanced than the others and I discovered that I was able to teach them about The Home and The Community with the aid of felt figures and experience charts. We would "discuss" the figures on the felt board illustrating, for example, the living room. "What is this? This is a couch. What do we do with a couch? We sit on a couch." After the children had full command of the names and functions of the various objects I would ask them to cut out magazine clippings of the objects for homework. We then proceeded to construct our experience charts using the clippings the children brought in and also their descriptions of the room.

4. Action games -- The children seem to enjoy this technique the most. I have been able to teach many different concepts with this technique. I used a "Simple Simon" type game to teach the parts of the body. I remembered an old jingle that I learned as a child and used this for review of the parts of the body. It is important however, that the children speak in sentences at all times. Often I found myself saying "Please speak in a sentence" over and over again. It is necessary, though, that the children become accustomed to using as well as hearing the new language.

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I also used dramatization of action commands and action words to teach the basic commands and actions the children would need for normal functioning in a school situation. I found that the round-robin technique was very useful especially with commands since it enabled the children to give as well as follow the command. For example, I would ask one child to stand up and after he did he would ask the next child, etc.

5. Instructional pictures -- For the children who have advanced beyond the lowest level of the new language pictures illustrating various scenes such as the supermarket, a policeman crossing a group of children, etc. are helpful. These pictures may be used to develop guided conversations, allowing the children to speak in sentences and to increase their vocabularies.

Naturally there are many more visual aids that I have become aware of such as illustrated verbs, picture dictionaries, numerous lotto games, etc. I do not have my own classroom and therefore it would be physically impossible to assemble these things. Also, my contact with the children this semester has been rather inconsistent since I am an above-quota teacher and I generally substitute for absent teachers about three days a week. Thus, it has been difficult to achieve very much with these children because of my rather erratic schedule . However, working with

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these children has made me aware of the definite need for a full, well-equipped, well-staffed program, especially aimed at orientating these children into their new environment in America. I see now what an important field teaching English as a second language has become and how important it is to educate more people about the urgency of this problem in our schools.

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